

~~SECRET~~

1/16/81

C/FI 11 FEB 57
C/PP
C/SR 25X1A2g

DEBRIEFING OF US REPRESENTATIVE JAMIE L. WHITTEN (D-Mississippi)

On 31 January 1957, from 1015 to 1200 hours, Representative Jamie L. Whitten was debriefed in the Director's Conference Room, Administration Building, at a meeting attended by the DCI, the DD/I and six Agency analysts.

Representative Whitten, as a member for the past two years of the House Appropriations Subcommittee (also Chairman of the House Agriculture Subcommittee), toured the Soviet Union and East European Satellites from 14 September to 22 October 1956, leaving Budapest 13 days before the Hungarian uprising.

The primary purpose of his tour was to make a field appraisal of US defense estimates. He made the trip on the following three conditions, all of which were granted:

1. No appointments with any Communist officials, so that upon returning to the US, he could not be charged with having been sold a "Commie bill of goods."
2. Travel be permitted to the fullest extent possible by train and automobile.
3. Only US Embassy officials be used as interpreters.*

Rep. Whitten stated at the outset of the debriefing that he would not go into a detailed description of his tour because he already had written a lengthy report on it which would soon be published.**

The purpose of his appearance at the debriefing was to register with CIA and the DCI his deep concern over the lack of a balanced intelligence picture on Soviet strengths and weaknesses in testimony presented before the House Appropriations Subcommittee, and its effects on US public opinion and defense spending.

He stated that the testimony given by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary and Under Secretary of Defense created the opposite impression of what US Embassy officials abroad told him as well as what he saw during his tour. He complained that all the Subcommittee gets is that evidence selected to support a bigger and better military build-up each year. Such evidence, he said, includes only the "sensational highlights" and fails to offset against Russian capabilities the many very real and significant Russian weaknesses which he noted during his trip.

* He praised highly the services of Horace Davis, US Embassy, Moscow, both as interpreter and for his knowledge and grasp of internal conditions in Russia, particularly agriculture.

** He gave to the DD/I a copy of his report in galley proof to be reproduced for internal Agency use.

He claimed that basic information on Soviet vulnerabilities is not being presented by US officials to his Subcommittee.* He questioned why this has not been done and wondered if US intelligence is actually getting the broad, objective, unsensational day-to-day facts, or whether such a lack of information indicates a slipup somewhere in the intelligence business. He cited as one example the following: Before his trip he was briefed by the Defense Department, particularly on Russian transport and railroads, and directed to find out how rail transloading from narrow to wide gauge was made at Brest upon leaving Poland for Moscow. He discovered there was no reason why the Defense Department should not have had this information years ago, as the transloading procedure at Brest, effected by hydraulic jacks, was evident to anyone passing through the railroad station and yards, access to which was unrestricted. Furthermore, this transloading procedure has been followed for a number of years as the cars were old and worn and had white painted indicators where the jacks were to be placed.**

It's his impression that Admiral Radford and Defense Secretary Wilson are not getting a balanced intelligence picture on the Soviet Union. He found in questioning these Defense officials that they did not appear to be aware of the nature and extent of recent changes in the Soviet Union since Stalin's death and the effect and significance of such changes for defense estimates. When he asked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to explain the reason for the current budget increase, he said Admiral Radford replied that the over-all estimate was based largely on the convictions of the Defense Department and President Eisenhower that there had been no change since Stalin's death, particularly in ultimate Soviet intentions for world domination. Rep. Whitten said he had observed during his trip that there had been all sorts of significant changes since Stalin's death, which if encouraged, might affect ultimate Soviet intentions, should pressures for change become sufficiently great.

He deplored the confusion created in US public opinion by contradictory statements which responsible US officials have issued on what has and has not changed in the Soviet Union. He feels this confusion has resulted in a rigid, unrealistic and inflamed picture of fear which Joe Smith carries in his mind about Ivan Ivanovitch. He cited as one example the reaction of his own constituents in Mississippi. Upon learning of his impending trip to the Soviet Union, many wrote him begging him not to go. They feared he would never leave the Soviet Union alive because of "what those Russians might do to you." On the contrary, throughout his trip he was astonished and amazed at the friendliness

* The DCI indicated this may be the result of confusion as to which government department or agency is responsible for what particular category of intelligence. He stated CIA would be more than happy to prepare a briefing for the Subcommittee at any time. (Rep. Whitten's remarks are to be evaluated within the context and scope of his trip and the fact he is cleared through Secret but has no access to Top Secret information and estimates on Soviet capabilities, vulnerabilities and intentions.)

** Rep. Whitten said in passing that US military attaches abroad are being used to do too many things, which because of their known status, renders them conspicuous in situations where civilian experts would have easier access.

~~SECRET~~

and curiosity of the average citizens he encountered, including Russian soldiers (although, as the DCI stated, the Russian people, as distinct from their leadership, have traditionally been friendly toward the American people). He was also surprised at the ease with which he could take pictures wherever he traveled. The image of an Orwellian "Big Brother" electronic eye following the every movement of each Soviet citizen and the Security Police breathing down the neck of each peasant is not an accurate or true reflection of internal conditions as he observed them. Yet he is convinced that an astonishing percentage of the American people, fed by sensational journalism, have this impression of the life of average Soviet citizens.*

Rep. Whitten conceded his remarks did not mean we should relax our guard. He made it clear he firmly supports legitimate defense and the necessary expenditures for nuclear and guided missile development. This, he thinks, can be achieved while still cutting a "healthy percentage" of current defense estimates. But, he does find cause for alarm in —

1. Steadily mounting appropriations each year for defense and the extent to which Congress has built military support into such an integral part of the US economy, increasing that sector of employment devoted to unproductive non-consumer goods, which if continued unchecked may wreck the economy.
2. The attitude reflected in the description of the present appropriations bill by the Chairman of his own Subcommittee as "containing something for everyone."
3. The spectacle of his fellow Congressmen more concerned with who's gotten the most money rather than whether the amount appropriated is commensurate with legitimate needs.
4. The spending of additional unnecessary funds on the location of Air Force and military development installations in the least desirable sites (using his own state as an example) because of political influence.
5. The intensified scramble to snap up new shares of stocks in aircraft and other defense companies which continue expansion as appropriations for contracts increase each year.

—all of which he deploras because of the parasitic consolidation of those pressures having a vested interest in maintaining and perpetuating a distorted and inflamed public opinion. This fear of the Russians reflected itself so effectively in the preceding Congress that the last budget resulted in the unique spectacle of granting the Secretary of Defense considerably more than even he asked for.

He contends that the lack of a balanced picture in information currently presented for American consumption has developed in the US public a fear psychosis which, as reflected in Congress, makes it exceedingly difficult to work out long-term solutions (which might now be possible in view of opportunities offered by recent changes in the Soviet Union) short of war.

* He said he even had difficulty in having his report of his trip published commercially (US News and World Report was not interested) because it contained no sensational revelations. The DD/I supported this point by re-

He strongly urged adoption of:

1. A greatly increased exchange of persons program to facilitate direct contacts between American and Soviet citizens and the elimination of present requirements for fingerprinting exchange visitors from Russia. Rep. Whitten said he was usually asked wherever he went in Russia the question of "When is the US going to lift its Iron Curtain?" He feels few US officials are sufficiently aware of the tremendous efforts Russia is making to attract tourism on a world-wide basis. Many new hotels are being built, one recently in Brest complete with English-speaking waiters. The Russians claim they will complete by next summer a new four-lane highway from Brest to Moscow.
2. A program designed to take fullest advantage of recent Soviet changes. Because Russians currently have nothing with which to compare their own standards, the primary emphasis in an increased exchange program should be direct contact in the US with those consumer goods commodities which the Soviet system cannot supply its citizens, thereby fostering dissatisfaction with what Russians have at home, increasing pressures for change and developing demands which the Soviet system cannot meet. Rep. Whitten cited as an example the very evident admiration and curiosity the Embassy's new Ford stationwagon evoked wherever he drove. The nearest model the Russians have produced (noted at the Moscow fair) is a copy of a 1948 Buick which is not even in mass production. He feels the "consumer vulnerability" is one of the most sensitive Soviet weaknesses which an effective US program could profitably exploit.
3. A concerted effort by US agencies responsible for intelligence to provide the American people an objective and balanced picture of Russia and the everyday life and attitudes of its people to relax tensions and release pressures on Congress which, in turn, would permit a more positive approach toward finding, short of war, solutions to current problems. Because, from what he observed, Russian realities are so far below Russian claims of achievement, there is much in which the American people can take comfort and opportunity, which would also facilitate more favorable conditions for the conduct and acquisition of intelligence. He believes it is just as important to sell this aspect of the picture to the American people as it is for Congress to continue to authorize necessary funds for legitimate US defense needs. Between these two points, the Representative from Mississippi pleads for a "sane" balance.*

* The DD/I felt that such an over-all program urged by Rep. Whitten for the relaxation of tensions would require in Congress the strong vigorous leadership and prestige of the President of the US.

Rep. Whitten showed colored slides taken on his tour and made them available for Agency screening and use.